

TMD Planning In Korea

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This page describes an 1998 7th Air Force briefing on Theater Missile Defense (TMD) in Korea. The document was partially declassified and released under the Freedom of Information Act and describes the TMD "strategy we are employing on the Korean Peninsula." The briefing examines how the US detects and warns CFC (Korean-US Combined Forces Command) of TMD launches, how the Patriot missile defense system currently deployed in South Korea defends against incoming missiles, describes various attack operations, and "presenting how we're applying the lessons learned to today's plan."

The briefing describes that the US currently (1998) has six Patriot batteries deployed in South Korea. The batteries are organized under the 1st Battalion (Patriot) of the 43rd Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Unit, and is the only Patriot battalion on the Korean peninsula. In October 1994, the 1-43 ADA replaced the 2nd Battalion of the 7th Air Defense Artillery unit (2-7 ADA), which was rushed to Korea in March 1994 in response to the crisis that followed North Korea's blocking of IAEA inspections and intention to withdraw from the NPR treaty. The six Patriot batteries are deployed at Suwon Air Base (Alpha and Bravo Batteries), Osan Air Base (Charlie and Delta Batteries), and Kunsan Air Base (Echo and Foxtrot Batteries).

The Air Force briefing helps illustrate how the US military expects North Korea to employ Scud missiles in a crisis and how they can most effectively be countered. The briefing suggests that planning for defensive and offensive operations are closely intertwined, and it underlines the extremely short warning times that face any decision making process in response to or preparation for a North Korean missile attack:

"A TBM launched from the SCUD belt will impact OSAN in only [deleted]. It takes between [deleted] to detect the TBM and to disseminate [sic] the warning. This only leaves [deleted] to take advantage of the warning. Saving seconds in important."

The briefing outlines three scenarios for how North Korea may choose to launch its missiles. Each of these scenarios demands different targeting strategies: 1) the North might launch exclusively from underground facilities; 2) disperse launchers in the field; or 3) use a combination of the two. The briefing describes option three as "the most likely."

For North Korea to hide the Scuds in underground facilities and essentially roll them out only to

launch could be seen as the most complicated U.S. targeting situation because of the brief warning time. Yet the briefing concludes that such an employment “makes the targeting process easier for us since they remain at known locations.” Once deployed out in the field, by contrast, the launchers are vulnerable only if they have been found. According to the briefing, dispersion “complicates our targeting solution greatly.” It adds: “Despite advances in our weapon systems, the launcher remains the most difficult target to hit.”

There is one more problem that complicates targeting of dispersed launchers. The briefing continues: “Although [launchers are] vulnerable during setup, we do not know where to look until the launch occurs. At that point, it is to [sic] late to strike since the [launcher] will be gone from the area within two minutes” after the missile is fired. “Launch points, detected by any means,” the briefing concludes, “are not targets” because the “ability of a [launcher] to hide after launch is far too rapid.”

In a crisis on the Korean peninsula, the briefing suggests, US forces would not be “Scud hunting” for individual launchers to destroy, but would instead search “for the greatest war-fighting impact, and that is to destroy the TMD [theater missile defense] infrastructure.”

The full declassified TMD briefing is available through the link in the right-hand bar.

FOIA documents

>> Department of the Air Force, 7th Air Force, briefing, "[Theater Missile Defense](#)," n.d. [1998]. Note: 8.5 MB. **NEW**

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